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Citizens' Patrols: Involving the Society in Community Crime Prevention

Nowadays there are many types of ensuring citizens' security at the local level. One of them are citizens' patrols. They can be named differently, and have differential powers, but always consist of the average citizens, and have the same goal, which is supporting local security services in protecting security and public order. The paper presents an idea of *community crime prevention* as a crime reduction tool, and one of its dimension, citizens' patrols. The presentation has an international perspective. There are presented American's patrols, where the idea of community crime prevention was born, and these are compared to the citizens' patrols existed in different European countries, including post-communist countries, such as Hungary and Poland.

1. Introduction

A traditional state criminal policy focused on the offenders, and had a repressive nature. Many measures were provided to regulate the consequences of committed crimes. If a state stays as a preventive, it acts by effecting on offenders, or by general prevention of criminal law. Since early 70's of the past decade, these rules were evolving, and in the world started to spread an idea of improving an effectiveness of criminal policy through prevention activities much more oriented on potential crimes'

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victims, and committed crimes' circumstances. But the possibilities of state's reacting on threats are significantly limited. Thus there may develop the individual activities, or expand an area and a scope of private security services' activity. Both of these phenomenon appears as not appropriate: the individual activities may lead to the negative consequences, while expanding an area and a scope of private security services' activity may build two-class society¹, or even create a belief of deepening social inequalities. This is why community crime prevention became an attractive method of improving local safety.

The paper aims to present briefly an idea of community crime prevention, and then discuss one of its tool which are the citizens' patrols. Though a goal of citizens' patrols everywhere is the same (supporting local security services in protecting citizens' security and public order), they may be more or less institutionalized, and this premises decided mainly on their tasks and powers. The presentation is based on an international perspective. There are presented American's patrols, where the idea of community crime prevention was born, and these are competed to the citizens' patrols existed in different European countries, including post-communist countries, such as Hungary and Poland.

2. Community Crime Prevention

The idea of community crime prevention can be characterized as the activities, which aim to combat crimes at the local level, and are connected with changes of the society condition, or physical living condition in the communities². At the beginning community crime prevention was characterized only by so-called the 'great three', which consist of³: neighborhood watch, signing items, and home security survey. The

¹ J. Obergfell-Fuchs, *O znaczeniu prywatnych firm ochrony osób mienia w Niemczech z uwzględnieniem aspektów integracji europejskich*, in: J. Czapska, H. Kury (red.), *Mit o represyjności albo o prewencji kryminalnej*, Kraków 2000, p. 282.

² T. Hope, *Community Crime Prevention*, Crime and Justice 1995, p. 21 and following.

³ D. Rosenbaum, *The Theory and Research behind Neighborhood Watch: Is it a Sound of Fear and Crime Reduction Strategy?*, Crime and Delinquency, 1987, No. 33, p. 104.

meaning of community crime prevention has been changed in time, and started including different programs and activities.

The basic goals of community crime prevention are quantitative and qualitative crime reduction, improving sense of citizens' security, improving life quality in community, and strengthen ties between residents. They are realized by organizing a following process: the organizations in the communities involve its members to participate in different crime prevention programs, a stronger sense of community and improved social interactions contribute to an informal social control. This community crime prevention is based on involving inhabitants to work together, and improving informal control.

The active community members reduce an opportunity of committing crime, and defer potential offenders by being visible, being read to taken the actions, braking passivity, and calling the police if it is necessary. In the community where informal control is strengthened, it is more difficult to commit a crime because of increased risk of offender detection. An organizing the neighborhoods to informal control should break a spiral, which is based on following elements: many crimes are committed because of informal control decaying in communities, and committed crimes are for its inhabitants means that nobody control the situation, what speed a process of disorganization.

Thus the main issue of the community crime prevention idea is a participation⁴. Participating in different programs and activities of crime prevention, beside contributing to society integration, causes also cooperating the society and local authorities in field of citizens' security. It is because communities do not act instead or against a state, but become a real partner of its institutions.

Other important element of community crime prevention is a social control⁵. A meaning of social control for community crime prevention illustrated J. Jacobs, who pointed out that firstly there should be understood a concept of public peace, which primarily is not ensured by the police, no matter how the police is needed; it is ensured by a knotty,

⁴ T. Hope, *Community...*, *passim*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

complicated, and almost unconscious voluntary network of control, and the standards created and obeying by the society⁶.

Community crime prevention is a new victimization and situation approach⁷, according to crime prevention should be done by affecting on a crime victim instead of an offender, and reducing an opportunity of committing crime.

Community crime prevention means also improving live quality, where criminality is a one of many threats of its quality. The activities taken under crime prevention beside combating crimes, should also archive goals, such as general sense of citizens' satisfaction, and consolidate socially desirable behavior, which only protect against crimes.

3. An International Perspective of Citizens' Patrols

In the history of community crime prevention, beside neighborhood watch, a basic form of involving the citizens to community crime prevention were citizen's patrols. They are deliberate from two perspective, as: community crime prevention, and not allowed self-help ('vigilantism'). The paper concentrates on the first one.

At the beginning of the crime prevention phenomenon, in the USA the patrols were a typical activities of different behavior of citizens' involving in crime prevention. They have different compositions, goals, and a degree of institutionalization. According the available sources, in the mid-70's of the past decade the citizens' patrols consist mostly of volunteers, but here were also paid citizens, mixed patrols, and paid guards⁸, and they included citizens' patrols around the buildings, citizens' radio patrols, citizen's foot patrols across the city. Today's Americans' patrols do not play an important role. Neither now nor then the studies on their effectiveness did not prove their impact on crime reduction⁹.

⁶ J. Jacobs, *The Death and life of Great American Cities*, New York, pp. 31-32.

⁷ T. Hope, *Community...*, *passim*.

⁸ Cf. L. Sherman et al., *Preventing Crime: What works, What doesn't, What's promising*, Report to the United States Congress, Maryland, pp. 7-29.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

In the Europe the patrols with citizens' participation are more organized and institutionalized than the Americans'. There are citizens' patrols which aim is to secure own community (e.g. school patrols), or citizens' patrols which are paid by the community and local authorities. The members of the second one generally wearing the uniforms, get mobile phones or radios, and are obliged to pass a special training.

A quite specific form of citizens' patrol was accepted in Holland and Belgium, where unemployed citizens and these who uses a social assistance are employ by the local authorities to keep eye on the car-parks and public areas¹⁰.

In Holland the basic patrols' goals are petty crimes reduction, and citizens' sense of security improvement by being a visible in public areas (the guards are uniformed). The guards have the same powers as an average citizen. In case of any danger, they call the Police by using a radio. Anyway the police control their activity, and prepare a three week training for its future members. The citizens' patrols in Holland are funded mostly by the state (a ministry of justice and labor), communities, and dotation.

In Belgium are employed not only unemployed citizens but also students, and their work is paid by the state. Their goal is looking after the parked cars and bikes, they also provide prevention talks with the car drivers. Similar to the Holland guards, when something bad happens they cannot intervene, they can only call the police. And similar to the Holland guards, they wear uniforms in order to be more visible in public area.

In the Federal Republic of Germany citizens' patrols are differentiated regionally, and can be more or less institutionalized¹¹. The most institutionalized are the guards, which exists as an auxiliary police, they are called *Freiwilliger Polizeidienst*, and existed in Berlin, Hamburg, and the Baden-Wuerttemberg.

The *Freiwilliger Polizeidienst* in the Baden-Wuerttemberg was established in 1963. Its members have to be trained first (92 hrs.) to do their

¹⁰ J. Graham, T. Bennett, *Crime Prevention Strategies in Europe and North America*, Helsinki 1995, p. 77.

¹¹ H. Gross, B. Frevel, *Handbuch der Polizeiein Deutschland*, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 53-54.

job. Its main task are: protecting objections, road traffic, patrolling. The members have the same powers which the police officers have, but a firearm can use only those, who has got property skills¹². Their uniform are similar to the police.

The members of the *Freiwilliger Polizeidienst* in Berlin, which was established in 1961, after fourteen-day training may do their job¹³. At the beginning it was mainly supporting the police during events including demonstrations, since 1992 they could also control traffic road, and patrol the roads. From this time they got also powers similar to the police officers', including using a gun.

Other activity provides the Hamburger *Freiwilliger Polizeidienst*, established in 1962. The citizens' can join to the guard in order to keep eye on the traffic road, and support the police in the special cases, such as natural disasters, explosions, and so on. They have the same powers as the police officers, beside right to use a firearm. They do not have to be trained to do their job.

The most controversial are citizens' guards in Bavaria, and Saxony, which are called the *Sicherheitswacht*. The Bavarian guards consist of the average citizens trained by the police. Their task are to cooperate with the community, and improve the sense of security of its members. They are equipped with mobile phones, shoulder bands, and they have more powers than an average citizens, such as checking ID cards, questioning to the witnesses, imposing to leave the public area, in specific situation they can also bring the person to the police station, and in case of opposition they can arrest the person. They are not allowed to use any coercive measures beside acting during self-defense, or state of necessity. The Bavarian guards cooperate closely with the police, and cannot patrol their own community to avoid a charge of spying their neighborhoods.

The Saxony guard has similar tasks to the Bavarian guard, these are patrolling public places on a weekday alone or with the police. They wear the vests with properly signed. They cannot intervene, but are obligated to call the police. They are allowed to ensure order during different events, protect objects, establish citizens' identity, order to leave an area, bring a person to the police station, and in certain cases use coercive

¹² *Ibidem* pp. 53-54.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 108-110.

measure, such as physical strength. They cannot use any other coercive measures, such as baton or firearm. They can begin to do their work after sixty-hour training. It is because the main Saxony guard goal is to support the police, it is not an auxiliary police like outlined above guards in Berlin.

Similar activity to the Saxony guard has the guard in Brandenburg which is called the *Sicherheitspartner*¹⁴. The basic difference is connected with a membership. Firstly there is organized a gathering which consisted of all inhabitants, and is directed by a police officer. During such meeting a police officer together with the inhabitants considers a security condition in community, and also gives inhabitants advices, how to protect against different dangers. Then the gathering chooses the candidates for partners, which are later checked by the police, and in case of positive opinion, they are appointed by the commander of the city police to be a partner. The partners have not special powers, and are allowed to carry out their tasks only after finishing a two-week training. They are not armed, and are equipped only with mobile phone in order to communicate with the police. Besides patrolling, they also mediate conflicted community members, give advices in the field of traffic road, or protect property.

In Germany there are also much less institutionalized citizens' guards. For example in Dietzenbach nearby Frankfurt was established an association of 30 members, who patrols at night large housing estates (often with dogs). In other small city adult unarmed men organized patrols at night in order to protect different social categories (elderly people, woman), shops, and community property. In Jacobsdorf men with the batons wanted patrolling in order to protect a public order.

In the post-communist countries the attitudes towards citizens' patrol are different. In early 90's they become very popular in Hungary, and were institutionalized as an association, which was called the *Országos Polgárőr Szövetség*¹⁵. Its existence is based on general laws, the members have the same powers as an average citizen, and the basic tasks are following: patrolling community, calling the police about different dangers, protecting property and order, educating and informing about community

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ J. Vigh, *Crime and its prevention in Hungary*, Euro Criminology 1994, No. 7, *passim*.

crime prevention. A institutionalized model of citizens' patrol adopted in Hungary is quite similar to the Polish.

4. Citizens' Patrols in Poland

The citizens' patrols in Poland may exist in two different forms: informal, and then their task is an informal control of a neighborhood, and formal, when they closely cooperate with the security services, and are mostly established to keep eye on the park-cars. The second one, institutionalized guards may be established as an association, or on the basis of a municipal (city) council decision.

The rules of association state the Act on Associations from 7 April, 1989 (Journal of Laws 1989, No 79, item 855 as amended). The art. 45 of this act obligated to consultate with the Ministry of the Interior, a range of the association activity, which is directly related to protecting public order. An association activity is supervised by governor territorially competent for an association seat. The citizens' guards existed as an association are allowed to cooperate with the local authorities, law enforcement authorities, and security services. It seems that the most appreciate level of citizens' guards is a municipality.

According to the art. 7.1.14 of the Act on the Municipal Government (Journal of Law 1990, No. 16, item 95 as amendment) one of municipality 'own tasks' is met community needs in the field of public order and citizens' security. Similar to establishing the municipal (city) guards, the citizens' guards are established by a decision of the municipal (city) council. An establishing guards at the initiative of the local governance should be preceded by consultations with community (art. 5a).

For such established citizens' guards it is necessary to define the rules of cooperation with the law enforcement authorities, which are the local Police, and municipal guard. These rules are specified quite similar the acts of both security services. According to the art. 1.1.3. of the Act on the Police (Journal of Law 1990, No. 30, item 179 as amendment) one of the basic tasks of the Police is initiate and organize activities in order to prevent committing crimes and petty crimes, and in this field cooperate with the state and local authorities, and also with the social organizations. Whereas the art. 11.8 of the Act on the Municipal Guards (Journal of

Law 1997, No. 123, item 799 as amendment) states that one the municipal (city) guards' tasks is to inform the community about condition and kinds of threats in order to prevent committing crimes and petty crimes, and cooperate in the field with the state and local authorities, and also with the social organizations.

The citizens' guards activity is differential, including for example: keeping eye on communal building and property or communities members' property (cars parked on the car-parks), observing an incident place and also offender's mode of action and behavior, informing by mobile phones about committing or attempt to commit a crime, spreading among the community a property behavior in the field of citizens' security and public order, patrolling the community. This catalogue is defined by law, it is not closed, thus citizens' guards activity is each action, within the powers, taken in order to support security services in preventing crime or reacting on committed (petty) crimes.

The officers of citizens' guards have the same powers as an average citizen. In a field of liberty deprivation, officers cannot arrest anybody, but similar as an average citizen, are allowed to hold a person, who committed a (petty) crime. It can be done in two situations: red-handed, and chasing this person, because there is a danger that this person will hide or escape, or there is no possibility to establish an identity of this person. Holden person should be passed to the Police immediately. This powers is define in the art. 243 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Journal of Law 1997, No. 89, item 555 as amendment). The only situations, when the officers can exceed their powers are a state of necessity, and self-defense.

The officers are allowed also to provide a temporary assistance the police, or and municipal guard officer, if citizens' officers consent in writing under the rules defined in the acts on the Police, and Municipal Guards. Such consent is not required is case of acting in state of self-defense or state of necessity, and also when saving lives or health, property, acting in case of disasters or natural disaster. Then oral agreement is enough.

The officers, similar to an average citizen, if learned of the offence prosecuted ex officio, has a social responsibility under the art. 304 of the Code of Penal Procedure, to call the prosecutor or the Police, and also

other authorities empowered to provide a preliminary proceedings, e.g. the Border Guard or other specified in the art. 312 of the Code of Penal Procedure.

The officers of citizens' guards are not equipped with a gun, and any other coercive measures, such as hand cuffs, batons, or guard dogs. They are allowed only to use mobiles phones or other communication means, which let them to call the Police or municipal guard. They can also use other helpful items, such as a bike or flashlight. The officers may have the elements of outfit (e.g. vest, cap), or badges, which let them easily to identify. Such visual identification may deter the potential offenders, and improving community members' sense of security.

4. Concluding Remarks

Beside many advantages of the idea of community crime prevention (outlined above in point 2.) and its tool which are citizen's patrols, a literature indicates that citizens' patrol or patrols with participation of citizens should be assessed negative for several reasons. These have been perfectly pointed out by J. Czapska in her study on citizens' security¹⁶.

First of all, she emphasises that a police officer patrolling area around is allowed not only to do his job well and properly react on a particular incident but also in the same time take care a citizens who accompanied him by patrol, who is still only a citizen and never will be prepared for policing as well as the police.

Secondly, she pointed out a possibility that patrols of auxiliary police, like the *Freiwilliges Polizei* in Germany, may be a risk for both patrolling and citizens. These second one can be bother by patrolling only because they do not correspond with their image of a 'normality', e.g. they have red head or earrings. This situation may create inadequate responses to the causes, what may in turn distract attention from the real threats.

The third charge is related to the powers of citizens' guards. Citizens' guards activity is based on general norms, without any special laws. Additionally its guards have the same powers as an average citizen, which

¹⁶ J. Czapska, *Bezpieczeństwo obywateli. Studium z zakresu polityki prawa*, Kraków 2004, pp. 135-136.

are: self-defense, state of necessity, and holding red-handed. The frequent use of this powers by an average citizens lead to its instrumentation, while they should be used exceptionally. In many advantages of citizens' patrol, there should be seen primarily that a citizens' patrol evolution may lead to declining trust to the state and its ability to complete assigned tasks in the field of security, and this in turn lead to a 'new vigilantism'¹⁷.

J. Czapska indicates that there should be strengthen trust between community and local police, and this trust should be built in other ways¹⁸. The society should be activated by creating citizenship in the field of security and local structures of citizenships. An alternative for citizens' patrol should be the activities taken in order to improve living conditions in the communities according the idea of community policing, with the principle rules of neighborhood watch, and also the activities taken in order to increase citizens' willingness to call the police in case of committed (petty) crimes.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.